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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in January 1981 to assess the level of research activities within the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). The study sought to identify the staff and monetary resources allocated to research; the activities in which researchers were involved and the amount of time they devoted to each; and those areas which respondents felt should be expanded or deleted. An open-ended questionnaire was completed jointly by the principal researcher and college president at each of the LACCD's nine campuses. Study findings revealed that: (1) budgets allocated to research activities averaged slightly more than $50,000 per year per college; (2) an average of 0.81 certificated researchers and 0.59 support staff members were employed at each college; (3) the largest proportion of research time was spent in the identification of trends in, for example, demographics, enrollments, and grade distributions (19%); follow-up studies of graduating students (15%); and evaluation of programs and procedures (14%); (4) these same three research activities were identified by the respondents as most in need of expansion; and (5) when asked which research activities should be discontinued in order to expand in other areas, respondents most frequently suggested deleting the completion of questionnaires. The survey instrument is appended. (HB)

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EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH FUNCTION IN A LARGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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Office of Educational Planning & Resource Development
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In times of declining resources there is often pressure to save money by eliminating research and evaluation functions. Proponents of this idea contend that research and evaluation produce no direct student contact, no instruction nor benefits, and is therefore expendable. In contrast, others contend that in times of limited resources, research and evaluation activities should be expanded to identify successful didactic strategies and improve instructional efficiency. However, before any recommendations regarding the disposition of community college research and evaluation functions can be made, a formative evaluation to identify activities, specific personnel, and associated costs must be performed. Such an assessment was conducted by the Los Angeles Community College District's Office of Educational Planning and Resource Development.

The specific purposes of the study were to:

1. identify staff and monetary resources allocated to research activities,
2. identify the activities in which researchers have been involved,
3. determine the amount of time that researchers spent on each activity, and
4. identify those research activities which should be expanded or deleted.

-METHODOLOGY-

In January 1982, the 9 colleges of the Los Angeles Community College District were surveyed by means of an open-ended questionnaire. The instrument was completed jointly by the principle researcher and president of each college. A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix A.

-RESULTS-

Budget and Staffing

Budgets allocated to research activities ranged from approximately $30,000 to $65,000 annually, averaging slightly more than $50,000 per college. Nearly all of the research budgets were allocated to salaries. Therefore, differences among college research budgets were primarily a reflection of staffing allocations such that a college with twice the staff had twice the budget.

The certificated research staff totaled to the equivalent of 7.25 full-time personnel, averaging 0.81 researchers per college. The average was less than one full-time person per college because several colleges assigned their researchers other functions. For example, half of an individual's time may have been devoted to research while the other half was spent in resource development or admissions activities. The colleges ranged from a low of 0.5 to slightly more than 1.0 researchers. The 7.25 certificated researchers were supported by 5.33 full-time equivalent classified staff. The staff were generally secretaries or clerks.

Current Activities

The respondents were requested to structure their answers by clustering their research activities into the 12 categories described by Gold (1977). The categories and the percentagage of total research time spent in

performing each activity are presented in Table 1. It can be seen that the the identification of trends occupied the largest proportion of research time, at 19%. The kinds of activities included in this category were studies of demographics, program enrollment changes and grade distribution changes. Two other categories, doing follow-up studies of graduating students and evaluating programs and procedures, followed closely, consuming 15% and 14% of the researcher's time respectively. These 3 most frequent activities accounted for almost half of the research time.

Following these three most frequent activities were a cluster of activities which were performed about half as often. Functioning as a questionnaire clearinghouse, that is completing questionnaires such as the HEGIS Report (Higher Education General Information Survey), President's Faculty Load Report, or forms for other agencies such as the California Postsecondary Education Commission, accounted for 9% of the research time. Surveying faculty and students, which generally consisted of opinion and attitude surveys, occupied 8% of the time and surveying community needs and collecting demographic data accounted for 7% of the research efforts.

Several observations regarding the utilization of research time were made during the tabulation of the data. Five of the 9 colleges surveyed spread their research time broadly among all 12 categories, while the other 4 colleges concentrated their efforts in 2 or 3 areas. All colleges were engaged in some form of trend identification and nearly all were involved in the evaluation of programs and procedures. There was no significant relationship between the size of the college enrollment and the categories in which research efforts were concentrated. Perhaps the most important

observation that can be made from the data of Table 1 is that the largest proportion of research activity was involved in the identification of trends. This activity forms the basis for setting the future direction of a college and in determining the types of programs which will be needed. The second and third most frequently performed activities, the evaluation of programs and performing follow-up studies, are the means of identifying successful programs. Therefore, to reduce or eliminate research office functions would directly affect the ability of a college to determine how well it is currently performing and to identify in what directions it should be moving in the future. Thus, a college without a research office is like a ship without a rudder to steer by and a navigator to plot its course.

Activities to be Expanded or Deleted

The campus researchers were also asked to identify those activities which should be expanded and those which should be deleted. These activities were grouped into the 12 categories described previously and are presented in Table 2. It can be seen that 12, or 22%, of the 54 activities listed to be expanded were in the category of identifying trends, while evaluating programs and doing follow up studies were second most frequently recommended activities for expansion. Comparisons of Tables 1 and 2, reveals that these are the same 3 activities which currently occupy the greatest amount of research time. This finding would seem to indicate that researchers deem as most necessary the activities they are currently engaged in and see a need for more of what they are doing.

It could be argued that the answers provided by the college researchers are self-serving. That is, the researchers do the activities they find most

interesting or enjoyable and naturally advocate doing more of what they enjoy. The survey investigated this possibility and found that at all colleges research priorities are established in consultation between the researcher and supervisor. The supervisor was usually a dean or college president. Therefore, the researchers did not have sole control over the choice of research activities to be pursued.

It is interesting to note that the two activities of surveying community needs and assisting the student placement process were two categories which are not currently performed to any large extent (7% and 4% of the reserach time on Table 1). However, according to Table 2, researchers felt these activities should be expanded.

In terms of programs to be deleted, the most often cited activity was the completion of questionnaires. (Hopefully, this did not relate to or reflect on the quality of the questionnaire they were completing for this study). Overall, there were considerably fewer recommendations for the deletion of activities, only 8, as opposed to 54 recommendations for expansion.

-SUMMARY-

In conclusion, community colleges generally have less than one full-time researcher and spend approximately $50,000 annually for the research function. Nearly half of the research time is spent in identifying trends, evaluating programs, or doing follow-up studies. These are the activities most needed by a college to determine how successfully it is performing and in what directions it should be headed in the future.

Table I

Categories of Research Activities and the Percent of Total Research Time

Categories	Percent Time
Identifying Trends	19%
Evaluating Programs or Procedures	15%
Performing Follow-up Studies	14%
Filling Out Questionnaires	9%
Surveying Faculty/Students	8%
Surveying Community Needs	7%
Collecting and Disseminating Information	6%
Assisting the Accreditation Process	5%
Assisting in Student Placement	4%
Developing Proposals or Grants	4%
Performing Classroom Research	4%
Enhancing the College's Image	3%
Other Activities	3%

Table 2

Number of Activities to be Expanded or Deleted

Catgories	Number of Activities Expanded	Deleted
Identifying Trends	12	0
Evaluating Programs or Procedures	11	0
Performing Follow-up Studies	11	0
Filling out Questionnaires	0	5
Surveying Faculty/Students	1	1
Surveying Community Needs	6	0
Collecting and Disseminating Information	3	0
Assisting the Accreditation Process	1	0
Assisting the Student Placement	5	0
Developing Proposals or Grants	1	0
Performing Classroom Research	2	0
Enhancing the College's Image	1	1
Total	54	8

APPENDIX A

DISTRICTWIDE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What staff members does your college have which perform institutional research activities? Include both certificated and classified employees. Indicate title, proportion of full-time assignment devoted to research and the other major functions and proportions of time for each position. (Example: Coordinator: research .5; resource development .5).

2. What is the 1981-82 budget for your institutional research activities? Include all personnel and other expenses.

3. What are the current institutional research activities? Indicate categories, examples of specific projects, and approximate proportion of the staff time identified in 1 above devoted to each category. (It is recommended that you use the 12 categories discussed in Ben Gold's Change article.)

4. What are the institutional research activities that are identified in 3 above which should be expanded or improved? Indicate the estimated staff time and budget that would be required.

5. What are the institutional research activities which are not currently being performed but which you would highly recommend? Indicate the estimated staff time and budget required.

6. What are the institutional research activities now being performed which could be discontinued to provide the staff and budget required by 4 and 5? Indicate the estimated staff time and budget.

7. How are priorities established and who is involved?

8. Provide signature of person completing the survey.

9. Provide College President's approval signature.

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